SEPTEMBER 2009

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET

A Museum Of County Life

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Impressions is published seven times a year, from September to May

Address:
Museum on Main Street
500 N. Main Street
at Beakes
and N. Kingsley Streets
P.O. Box 3336
Ann Arbor MI 48106-3336
Phone: 734.662.9092
E-Mail:
wchs-500@ameritech.net
Website:
www.WashtenawHistory.org

The Washtenaw County Historical Society is a 501(C)(3) organization. Annual Dues, which are from January through December are: Individual: $15; Couple/ Family: $25; Student or Senior (60+) $10; Senior Couple: $19; Business/ Association: $50; Patron: $100.

Murder, Mayhem & Mischief Come to Town

Murders, thefts, scams and riots are not unique to the 21st century. Research by the WCHS exhibition committee has revealed that these crimes and more were committed in Washtenaw County during the 19th century.

Opening August 29 and running through November 29, "Murder, Mayhem and Mischief: Crime in Washtenaw County in the 19th Century," will give Museum on Main Street visitors an opportunity to learn how these crimes were committed and solved and how the perpetrators were punished – or not!

Visitors will be invited to test their own observations, knowledge and intellectual skills in crime solving.

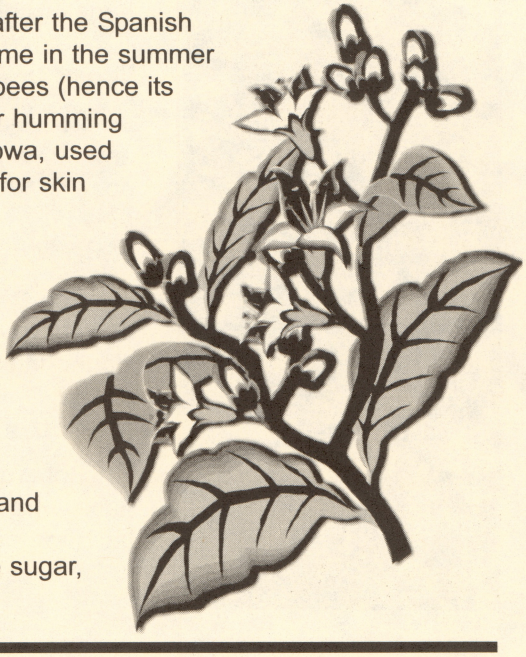
Watch *Impressions*, the Washtenaw County Historical Society's home page (http//WashtenawHistory.org), ads in the *Ann Arbor Observer* and listings in the *Observer's* event calendar for public programs related to this exhibition.

The Museum on Main Street is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 pm. Groups are welcome, as are individuals, by appointment. Arrangements can be made by calling 734-662-9092. Admission and parking are free. Donations are welcomed.

Front Yard News

Whatever you call it - bee balm, Oswego tea, *bergamot* or *Monarda* – it is a visual treat for the senses. The dark crimson flowers peeking above the white picket fence along Main Street bring beauty to those passing by and provide a striking accent to the historical garden that surrounds the Washtenaw County Historical Society's home.

Monarda didyma, a perennial named after the Spanish botanist Nicholas Monardes, is quite at home in the summer heat and serves as a source of pollen for bees (hence its nickname bee balm) and a food source for humming birds. Native Americans, including the Ojibwa, used the plant as an antiseptic and in poultices for skin infections and minor wounds



Brenda Hyde, a freelance writer living in rural Michigan, suggests using the plant to make iced tea in the following way:

- Pour eight cups of boiling water over a half-cup of bee balm flowers and leaves, covering the blend.
- Allow to steep for one hour.
- Strain the mix, discarding the flowers and leaves.
- Sweeten the remaining tea with a little sugar, chill and serve over ice.

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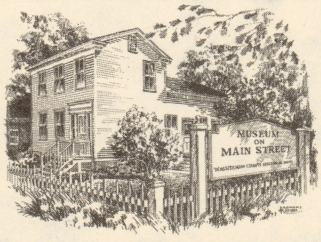
LESLIE LOOMANS

President's Letter

The Washtenaw County Historical Society Board of Directors, under the leadership of Past President Richard Galant, began work this past spring on a new strategic plan for our Society. At our June board meeting, we successfully reached the first milestone, a new mission statement, which appears on the back page. While the existing statement served us well over the last many years, the new one is much shorter and easier for our membership to remember, and focuses all of us on essential aspects of our mission: **To educate and inspire our community to engage in the preservation and presentation of area history**.

The challenge for all Society members is embedded in the words "to educate and inspire our community." Some of us may be better at educating and others better at inspiring, but we are all pretty excited about Washtenaw County history, and need to project that excitement. Preservation and presentation is what not only our members, but also our community, need to engage in. Fortunately the very existence of our Society during the past 150 plus years has left us with extensive collections. This process must continue! Our presentations of exhibits, lectures, newsletter and museum shop books and other historic materials probably only scratches the surface of what is potentially possible.

So, let the board of directors hear your thoughts about "educate and inspire" and "preservation and presentation." As we continue the development of the strategic plan throughout this fall, we will value and need your input.



VOLUNTEER WITH US:

Contribute Your Time

Are you looking for a way to contribute to the community? Do you have a few hours a week available? The Museum on Main Street can use your help. Call 734.662.9092 or e-mail wchs-500@ameritech.net to volunteer.

Work in the Museum Shop

Job Description: Work in the Museum Shop maintaining the stock of books and other items for sale and the computerized inventory of stock, advise the docents who sell the goods, and deposit sales income. Hours: Can be arranged.

Help Maintain the Garden

Job Description: Help maintain what has become a jewel in the gateway to downtown Ann Arbor by assisting with planting, weeding and garden design. Hours: Individualized to accommodate your schedule.

Meet the Volunteer of the Month

Bob Yuhasz, better known at the Museum as "Mr. Fix-it," quietly fixes and hauls whatever needs fixing or hauling. This month Bob tackled the hinges and latch for the Museum gate. Thanks Bob!!!

WASHTENAW STORIES

Art Fair Celebrates 50 Years

Now that the Annual Ann Arbor Art Fair has come and gone for the 50th year, we thought our readers would like to take a brief look back.

South University Avenue during the first fair in 1960. Tents protected some of the artists; the rest were open to the elements. Paper fish flew gaily from the street-lights and became the trademark of the Ann Arbor Street Art Fair.

When Bruce Henry and other South University street merchants approached the Ann Arbor Art Association with the idea of expanding their annual Bargain Days with an art fair, they were met with responses such as, "What is an art fair?" and "No good artist will sit on the street." But despite the negativity, they decided to give it a try.

The first fair had three small tents and string stretched between parking meters from which artists hung their work. The association had to beg artists to participate in what was later described as a "scraggly little fair." But that was the year of its birth. And just as infants grew, so did the fair.

By age one 30,000 visitors viewed the work of 261 artists and the fair included carnival rides, animal acts, music and even a fashion show. By age nine, two siblings had been born. Operating together as a "well oiled machine" the 1969 fairs supported more than 400 artists and 200,000 visitors, and contributed $300,000 to the local economy.

There were, of course, some growing pains. Complaints that local artists were being shut out resulted in a new jurying system. Poachers (those who sold wares without a license or paying the entry fees) had to be curtailed. Continuing to this day are complaints about lack of parking. One early poster welcoming visitors to the fair contained "No Parking" signs.

And then there is the weather. Contrary to popular belief, every art fair is not hit with a fierce summer storm. But storms are common enough to have entered the fair's mythology. In 1980, when postponed because of the Republican convention in Detroit, the fair escaped the devastating green-skied storm that swept through the area that week.

While organizers cannot control the weather, they have tried to continuously improve the experience for both artists and visitors. Shuttle buses, Porta-Potties, credit card payments, and art fair guides assist visitors while artists have come to rely on booth sitters to provide them a brief break.

Although statistics from this year's fair were unavailable before *Impressions* went to the printer, by the time you receive this, we should know what affect the economy had on attendance and sales this year.

OFF THE SHELF

Not Just Another River Town

Brenda Bentley has produced a book that serves as a history and self-guided tour of the areas surrounding the Huron River as it flows through Ann Arbor. *Riverwalks: Ann Arbor* tells the history of each area along the river's banks, from Barton Pond to Pioneer Geddesburg, with brief images of the early settlers, their mills, businesses and homes. Notes on the geological features along the river and the river itself set the scene for various walks (some might say hikes) around and through the parks, neighborhoods and recreational areas adjacent to the Huron.

Precise maps show local landmarks as well as the paths and walkways with descriptions of approximate lengths to complete each path and convenience stops along the way. Though the book might be a little cumbersome to take along when exploring these areas, copies, even enlargements, of the maps can be made and conveniently folded to fit a pocket.

The book is a great gift for the armchair adventurer, the avid hiker or those just trying to follow doctor's orders to "get out and walk." *Riverwalks: Ann Arbor* is available at the Museum on Main Street for $25, which includes tax.

New Consortium Brochure in the Works

The Washtenaw County Consortium includes more than two-dozen organizations that share information and resources. The group's current brochure is being replaced with a new foldout design including pictures of individual attractions and a map of Washtenaw County. The new brochure's design and lower per-piece cost should increase its "shelf life." Fifteen thousand copies will be available in the fall of 2009.

For more information about the Consortium or its new updated brochure, please e-mail the Washtenaw County Historical Society, at wchs-500@ameritech.net.

And They Are Still Coming!

They came from New York, Ireland, Germany, New England and the Southeastern states. Some stayed; some moved on; some returned to their original homes. But all of them added to the growth and development of Washtenaw County.

Immigrants and emigrants from around the country and the world are still arriving. They come as students and never leave. They come as teachers and technicians and find success. They come as artists and artisans, business executives and skilled labor, and most of them stay.

Jordan Huang performs on the Erhu.

The Society's exhibition at the Museum on Main Street, which ran from March through June, told the stories of the county's early settlers from Germany who came to Washtenaw County as farmers, raised crops and families and started businesses. It told of the Irish who settled in Northfield Township, farmed, built churches and encouraged friends and family in the "old country" to join them. It told of Greek businessmen, entrepreneurs and restaurateurs who brought with them a distinct culture of music, history, foods and festive costumes.

The stories included those of Jews who came from various foreign lands and joined together in communities and synagogues; of freed slaves; of folks who came by steamship, wagon and flat boat on the Erie Canal; and of those who came more recently by trains, automobiles and airplanes.

Visitors to the exhibition (more than 600 of them) were encouraged to pinpoint where in the world they or their families came from by placing pins on a world map. The map soon became dotted with pins on Russia, India, China, Arabia, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Africa and many other countries. To celebrate Asian-American Heritage Month in May, members of the Ann Arbor Chinese Center of Michigan and the Michigan Taiwanese American Organization performed yoyo, martial arts and music.

Visitors also had the opportunity to share their own personal stories of "Coming to Washtenaw County" by writing them in a specially designated notebook. Your family's story is part of the history of Washtenaw County and although the exhibition has closed, there is still time to have it included in the Society's archives. Simply send it to the Museum on Main Street, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336. If you prefer, send it via e-mail to: WCHS-500@ameritech.net

Christopher Chen, Christopher Shih and Dallan Roan demonstrate amazing yoyo feats.

Learned at the Exhibition

Immigrant or Emigrant?

Since all of us have at some point left somewhere to come to where we are, both are correct. So why did the earliest Washtenaw County settlers consistently refer to themselves as "emigrants," even naming their earliest newspaper the *Western Emigrant*? It may have been because the first settlers believed that they had come from the east coast to the wilds of the Michigan territory, leaving civilization as they knew it behind.

Modern Immigration Patterns Revealed Perception vs. Reality

The top five groups of foreign born residents in Washtenaw County are Asian, Western European, Indian, Eastern European/Russian and Middle Eastern. The 6,000 Washtenaw County Chinese residents make up the largest single group within these categories.

Visitors' responses to the exhibition's contest concerning immigration patterns provided a glimpse at the striking differences between perceptions and reality. Popular incorrect answers often included "the Greeks." While there are quite a few residents of Greek heritage, most are not recent arrivals. "The Mexicans" was another popular but incorrect answer. Michigan and Washtenaw County are only 2 percent Hispanic. Many participants ignored Europeans in favor of people from India and the Middle East. They said this was because of the many Indian and Middle Eastern restaurants in the area as well as the large number of people they observed in attire from these countries.

Those Who Came from Germany

Nearly 20 percent of today's Washtenaw County residents are of German heritage. Motivated by economic, political and religious problems, these immigrants formed the first ethnic group coming to the area. To assist them, the government of Michigan published a detailed bilingual guidebook that provided maps and instructions concerning every detail of the journey. For instance, the book advised immigrants to carry only "small silver change," to "never accept bank notes" and to "never pay more than $1.50 to travel on the Erie Canal or $5 by rail."

The Gottlob Mast Family

Letters Tell the Story

"Three weeks ago I gave notice to my master, whereupon we both were nearly dissolved in tears," wrote Caspar Limpert in 1833 before embarking on his move across the ocean to an unknown land. "We will leave from Bremen for Baltimore or New York. What fate is destined for me in America, I do not know." Limpert was welcomed by 40 other German families already living in Ann Arbor.

"One has to learn everything differently here," wrote Gottlob Mast in 1847 to family in Germany. "I am with Americans who do not understand one word of German." Despite these difficulties he concluded, "I enjoy working here much better than in Germany and do not wish myself back." He urged others to come and to bring fruit saplings.

Immigration Packing List

Included in the "Coming to Washtenaw County" exhibition was the opportunity for visitors to imagine what they would put in their suitcases before moving to a foreign land. The responses included family photos, Bibles, money, jewelry etc. One of the most interesting responses, however, was "diplomas," offering some proof that professional training and status was seen as essential in establishing oneself in a new country.

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET

A Museum Of County Life

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan
48106-3336

Sunday • 2 PM
September 20, 2009

The Mysterious Death
of Dan Carey
Speaker: James Mann

Glacier Hills
Retirement Community
Hanson Room
1200 Earhart Road
Ann Arbor

Members & Guests Welcome

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 96

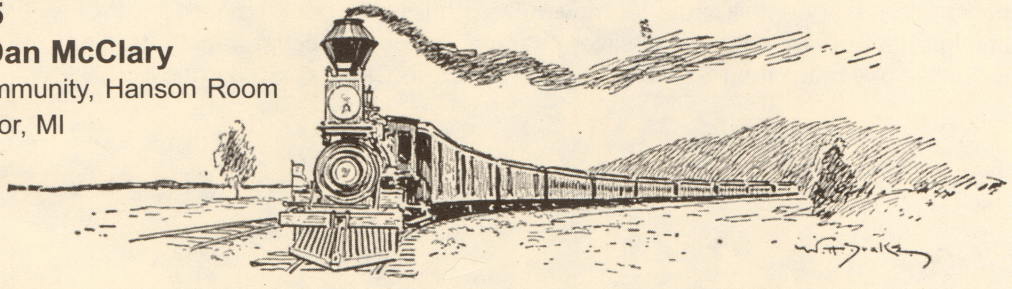
MEMBER 2009
NANCY KROHN
905 ROBIN RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-3008

Make Note
Fall Dates to Remember

Sunday • September 20
The Mysterious Death of Dan Carey • James Mann
Glacier Hills Retirement Community, Hanson Room
1200 Earhart Road, Ann Arbor, MI

Sunday • October 18
World War II: Front Line Nurse • Mildred MacGregor
Bentley Historical Library
1150 Beal Ave., Ann Arbor, MI

Sunday • November 15
Ann Arbor Railroad • Dan McClary
Glacier Hills Retirement Community, Hanson Room
1200 Earhart Road, Ann Arbor, MI



Mission Statement

The mission of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to educate and inspire our community to engage in the preservation and presentation of area history.